Positioning and Military Leadership

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"Positioning and Military Leadership" employs case studies of combat from Russia in 1812 and Arabia in 1916 to illustrate the application of positioning theory as a means of understanding emergent behavior.

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Positioning theory is important as a source of categories for interpreting complex human activities. Since there is no more complex human activity than the command and control of military activities in war, we will examine the positioning of those in command of combat operations. The operations examined are set in Russia in 1812 and in Arabia in 1916. They are separated not only in time but also in character; one is a compressed series of direct attacks to confront and *destroy* an enemy, while the other is a prolonged series of indirect thrusts and parries to avoid confrontation in order to *defeat* an enemy. The value of positioning theory is based on developing a more nuanced understanding of the differentiated viewpoints of the participants in these events or more accurately, episodes.[1] This understanding gives us more than a simple context for analysis of a particular episode; it provides a context in which a clearer view of emergent behavior in both the enemy and ourselves becomes evident across numerous episodes. Since these two operations are dissimilar not only in the style of execution but also in the style of leadership, they provide insight into the range of episode that we can interpret using positioning theory.

This project is not about *how* to solve the practical problems of the control of military operations, but rather it seeks to present a way to think *about* the conduct exhibited by the actors in episodes of the command of military forces. We begin with a brief overview of Positioning Theory.

POSITIONING THEORY

Positioning Theory has been described as: "The study of local moral orders as ever shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting."[2] More specifically, a position is defined as a

complex cluster of generic personal attributes…which impinges on the possibilities of interpersonal, intergroup and even intrapersonal action through some assignment of such rights, duties and obligations to an individual as are sustained by the cluster.[3]

[1] *An episode is a fragment of human life in which there are a series of events in which people participate that have a unifying and usually hierarchical structure.*
[2] *Harre and van Langenhove, Positioning Theory, (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1999) p.1.*
[3] Ibid.

In other words, my 'position' is based on a relation to others in a particular situation in which I am assigned certain rights and duties, or have certain rights and duties conferred because of my position in an organization, or my personal character, history, and so on. That position is more accurately defined in a systemic sense, one that could be conferred by a formal organization chart, but one that is also relational in the sense of the actual influence that is exerted through discursive relations within and without the established lines of authority in an organization. Formal position assignments are often a poor guide to actual positions of the actors.

This notion of relation is central to understanding Positioning Theory. For example, a baseball player who can only hit a fly ball 300 feet would not be considered (or 'positioned') as very competitive in the Major Leagues as his rights and duties as a player would be circumscribed. That same player's ability to hit a ball that distance, could, however, position him as the star of a local neighborhood team, with all the rights and duties that go with being considered a star player. So in order to understand Positioning Theory, we need to appreciate that: (1) prior assessments of personal skill, character and so on may be involved in positioning (2) there is a relative aspect to the positioning of the participants in relation to the other actors, the context, and the job at hand. Positions should therefore be understood as "ephemeral, disputable, and changeable."[4] All the participants additionally, and importantly, do not necessarily have a mutually shared understanding of those positions. Positioning Theory's relativistic nature is something that is displayed through the analysis of communicative discourse. As such Positioning Theory can be considered to be part of the confederation of ideas in Social Constructionism.

In order to understand the application of positioning theory we need to focus first on the concept of social constructionism. The importance of this concept to our study is that it "stresses that social phenomena are to be considered to be generated in and through conversation and conversation-like activities."[5] This notion is in line with a guiding precept of this project; that the social reality that we 'experience' is not innately given or perceived, but is co-created or co-developed by the contributors to the discourse (or conversation). Understanding this we are lead to conclude that the cognitive processes that influence the decisions we ultimately make, are a product of a communicative discourse. Positioning Theory is a way of examining this discourse with regard to the various levels and types of positioning that the participants, intentionally or otherwise engage in. This assessment of social phenomena generated through conversation (discourse) also leads to an appreciation of the relative nature of the creation of such phenomena. That creation occurs not in a private soliloquy with oneself but in the interaction with others in a public context. That public interaction is through our use of language, or put another way "the intentional use of symbolic systems by human beings…"[6]

[4] *Maghaddam, Hanley, Harre, The Kissinger Papers, Georgetown. p.11.*
[5] *Positioning Theory, p.3.*
[6] *Positioning Theory, p. 3.*

Central to my argument, therefore, is the postulation that the communicative discourse itself (as a symbolic system), does not represent some other cognitive process that is occurring or has occurred, but that the discourse itself *is* the cognitive process that we seek in order to better understand the events that took place. We evaluate military operations because they are the crucible in which human discourse is abruptly compressed and elongated, frequently causing misunderstandings that ultimately have lethal consequences. The participants in these events understand them in the context of episodes in which they occur. An episode comprises a series of events brought about by human action that have some unifying structure.[7] An example of an episode is the baseball game I referred to earlier. In this context, not only do the players create the game they are playing, through the continued deployment of rules, but also the rules themselves, as normative constraints, inform the behavior of the players in the episode of the baseball game.

The concept of an episode provides a vehicle that we can use to understand how the participants position themselves in a given situation. For instance, when a player is 'at bat', we can select that as an episode. Positioning phase 1 involves taking up the allowable roles in the game. It has its own rules and customs that the participants (pitcher, catcher, and batter) are aware of as they position themselves within that episode. The catcher may choose to position himself as the quiet extension of the pitcher, or he may position himself as the aggressive, vocal instigator of the sequence, either way he does this inside the commonly understood (at least among the participants) episode of being 'at bat.' Positioning phase 2 involves the assignment in taking up the rights and duties, which define the property of the actions that make up the episode. The concept of episodes is important for this study because it provide a context for evaluating the intentional actions that occur as part of an event or sequence of events, including the unifying focus of the event.

Positioning Theory is the place from which we begin to examine the discursive process of creating and managing social reality.[8] That social reality is composed of many episodes, within those episodes the context for the actions that form that social reality, are both created *and* lived. Although Positioning Theory is not considered a general theory, it's application and usefulness as a heuristic tool is an underlying theme of this essay. It is the essential tool for studying the ephemeral micro-moral orders, which shape the fine grain of life.

Positioning Triangle

Within the construct of an episode there is an active and evolving relationship between the positions taken by the participants, the unfolding of the ongoing story-line, and the social force (or meaning) of the actions being taken. The 'Positioning Triangle' portrays this triad of relations.

[7] *Positioning Theory, p.4-5.*
[8] *Positioning Theory, p.9-10.*

Social Force 1 (Social Force 2,3…) Story-line 1 (Storyline 2, 3…)[9]

The important thing about this triad of relations is that they are mutually influencing. For example, the positioning of a contributor to the discourse will have an effect on the social force (or illocutionary act, that is, what is meant *in* saying something) of an action, which in turn will be influenced by (as it too will influence) the evolving story-line of a particular episode.[10] There is, however, not one position or one story-line or one illocutionary act, but numerous ones occurring simultaneously as well as sequentially at different levels in the creation and management of a fragment of social reality. There is, however, no assurance that all the participants in a given episode are dealing with the same understanding of the relative position or weight of influence of each of the legs of the triad.[11] In fact, it is more likely that they are not.

The Positioning Triangle also gives us a concept with which to gain insight into the potential changes that might occur if one of the vertices of the triad were altered. As we will see in our case studies, altering a vertex of the triangle and / or the relationship of the vertices will have consequences that appear both unpredictable and unintended. Positioning theory, understood in our context, will help anticipate what some of those consequences might be since it enables us to see the interconnectedness of an intentional act through the evaluation of positioning of the participants and the relevant story-line that make up the Positioning Triangle.

In this essay we use Positioning Theory to examine two case studies of military campaigns, Napoleon in Russia and T.E. Lawrence in Arabia. To begin with, we will explore the decisions and actions of senior leaders of military organizations engaged in military operations. First we have the chance to evaluate the affect that their decisions had on the activities or episodes at the tactical levels of war where those decisions are executed. Second, we determine the extent to which those decisions were intended to influence other senior decisions makers more so than they were intended to influence the actual conduct of operations. Third, we examine the extent to which positioning of the participants, intentional or otherwise, contributed to the decisions that were made and the subsequent effect of those decisions on the actual operations on the ground. It is the interconnectedness of these episodes of communication between military commanders that is the focus of these case studies. We begin with Napoleon.

[9] *Kissinger Papers, p.12.*
[10] *Words, p. 122.*
[11] *Positioning Theory, p.18.*

THE BATTLE OF BORODINO

In Sept 1812 Napoleon Bonaparte fought a costly battle near the town of Borodino, which is approximately 60 miles west of Moscow. While the battle was ultimately a tactical stalemate, it represented a strategic event of immense importance. In the following examination we hope to better understand what influenced Napoleon's behavior and decisions in that episode of combat.

Positioning theory, as discussed previously, is: "based on the thesis that the type of participation that is open to any given member of the social group involved in the ongoing story-line that is unfolding in some episode is limited by a loosely defined set of rights, duties, and obligations."[12] Situational awareness, or the extent of understanding of a social reality, is the condition through which a position composed of those rights, duties, and obligations is occupied. That position, in this case study, defines the type of participation that Napoleon and each of his marshals is recognized as capable of manifesting.

Situational awareness, that is being aware of all possible information, or at least what is mutually understood by the participants to be relevant information about the activities at hand, allows a given contributor to position himself as 'superior' to the others. That situational awareness will also give him greater influence over the ongoing story-line. His superior position also contributes to increased credibility and force in his illocutionary speech acts—those that portray meaning in what is said.

PURPOSE OF DISCOURSE

It is the episodes of discourse between Napoleon and his commanders that interests us. Specifically, we are interested in the relations, both discursive and directive, that Napoleon had with his lieutenants - Marshal's Ney, Davout, and Murat - leading up to, and during the battle of Borodino. I will attempt to show how positioning theory can help us better understand what is at work in these relationships.

It is my contention; with regard to the directive orders issued by Napoleon that most of them were issued to maintain his position as the one in charge, but were not believed, even by Napoleon, to be carried out completely, if at all. The implication of this line of thought is that when leaders are in a discourse with other leaders, whether they are in a senior to junior relationship or in one of more or less equality with contemporaries, that the positioning in that discourse focuses at times completely, on the maintenance of the discourse. For example, Napoleon will always be positioned, at least tacitly, as superior to his marshals, whereas the marshals—Ney, Murat and Davout are, at least initially, positioned as contemporaries who are relatively equal in the ongoing dialog about the battle. The maintenance of the discourse begins with the initial positioning of the participants, however, as the discourse continues the positions

[12] *Kissinger Papers, p.10.*

of the marshals and Napoleon change. It is my contention that one of the factors that determine their relative positioning in that discourse is the mutually attributed level of situational awareness. For example, if one of the marshals sends a report from the line of battle, the assumption is that his report and his recommendations are credible since he is in the best position to have the greatest awareness of the ongoing battle. More so surely than Napoleon, who at Borodino is away from the fighting and not even following events on the battlefield that closely, certainly not as closely as was his custom.

Suppose, however, that we look at that discourse as an attempt by the contributors to create and manage a micro world in which their positioning, and their story-line and their illocutionary acts are all designed to continue the existence of that micro world. If that were the case we might see only a coincident relationship between decisions by leaders at the most senior levels and execution of operations on the ground.

LEVELS AND NETWORKS OF WAR

For the purpose of this essay we consider two different levels of war, the strategic and the tactical. The strategic is composed of senior political and military decision makers; in the case of the Emperor Napoleon there was only one decision maker since he was both the political and military leader of France. The other level is the tactical level; this level is composed of the soldier and his immediate leaders—those who are actually engaged in the fighting. Today we talk about a third level of war that has gained acceptance as part of the language of warfare. It is the operational level of war, that is the level at which commanders are concerned with translating strategic intent from policy makers (generally civilians) into tactical actions executable by military commanders. In Napoleon's case this was not an issue because he was acting as both the civilian head of government and the military field commander.

Although there is a connection between the different levels of warfare, it can easily be misunderstood because of an incomplete understanding of the multiple networks that make up the greater reality we know as 'experience'. In an effort to clarify, let us consider just two possible networks, a strategic network and a tactical network. It is my contention that decisions made in one network, at one level, will not necessarily affect the other in a direct, linear manner. While these two networks will obviously influence each other, the notion that they directly affect each other is problematic. For instance, a strategic decision, such as Napoleon's decision to invade Russia, while it does have an influence on tactical actions such as a cavalry charge at Borodino, does so only in the sense that one is being done in the context of the other.

There is a relation between these networks, but it is more normative than causal. If we consider the previous example where we looked at strategic and tactical actions, then we see that tactical decisions by leaders positioned in strategic networks are in many cases, irrelevant to the long-term outcome of a given situation. For example, when Napoleon is positioned as the Emperor, he is acting in a strategic network, and his decisions and orders at the tactical level, given in that strategic context, are likely to be irrelevant to actions on the ground. This may explain Napoleon's frequent issuance of orders at Borodino that were adrift without a story-line,

and therefore without context to make them 'real.' The relevancy that those decisions had was that they ultimately affected normative behavior, and not because they had a direct, casual affect on concurrent behavior. In this case the relative positioning of the contributors (to the respective networks in which they are operating), which is mutually established and maintained, *was* the normative structure in which communications between them was caused to exist. That position, in turn, determined the influence of the contributors (leaders) actions or decisions and its direction—up the chain of command to superiors, down the chain of command to subordinates, or across the chain of command to contemporaries. In other words, the positioning of tactical leaders in tactical networks is the normative or rule based structure that determines the kind and credibility of the communication they will have with members of the strategic networks.

SETTING THE STAGE

As we examine Napoleon's campaign in Russia and specifically the battle of Borodino it is important that we recognize a fundamental distinction. That distinction is between the question of a 'position' from the standpoint of the rights and duties to act, etc., and the question of the psychological and epistemic conditions supporting or justifying a 'position.' We shall be concerned with both in this study and will explore two separate story-lines. First, that " I" (Napoleon) am the Emperor of France and as such have the *right* to absolute command, second, that " I" (Napoleon) am a soldier engaged in the command of armed forces in a battle and have the *duty* to manage events in order to win that battle.

THE BATTLE

At the time that he began the Russian campaign in 1812, Napoleon was arguably at the apogee of his power and influence; however his 'position' was in question from the beginning.

> It was utter folly to launch such a massive campaign
> in a vast region where is was well known that food, supplies,
> and fodder would be at a minimum, and roads of any
> sort few and far between... Consequently,
> few corps commanders could adhere to Bonaparte's orders,
> which, moreover, sometimes went astray or at best were
> delayed by the vast distances and the general confusion.[13]

Napoleon can be seen here, early on in the Russian campaign, being positioned by his commanders as someone who is out of touch with the goings on at the execution level of the campaign. This positioning would continue throughout the planning and conduct of the battle of Borodino. It is interesting to note that already, in the beginning of the campaign, the illocutionary force of his messages had changed—his subordinates no longer saw them as 'orders.'

[13] *Napoleon Bonaparte, p.599.*

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS: THE INITIAL POSITIONING ACT

When Napoleon met with his marshals on September 6, 1812, the day before the battle, there appeared to be two potential courses of action or plans for the attack. One plan was suggested by Marshal Davout who argued that: "he could strongly hit the exposed Russian left flank, swing around and envelop it, thus turning the Russian line."[14] Davout also pointed out that: " the mighty Russian guns were dug in and aimed facing the west, not the south or southeast"[15] implying that as he attacked from the southern flank the guns would be unable to fire on his troops without being repositioned.

Napoleon was keenly aware of Davout's ability and although he praised him in some quarters, he was always careful not to give him too much credit in public. He was clearly jealous of Davout's growing and well-deserved reputation.[16] So when Davout offered his proposed course of action, he was positioned in the eyes of Napoleon and the other marshals, as having the *right* to propose courses of action because he was seen as a

competent and credible tactician. The discourse of this council of war on Sept 6th however, evolved so that it eventually consisted of Napoleon issuing orders with the aim of confirming his position as the Emperor without much regard for the execution of events on the battlefield, i.e. his speech acts changed their illocutionary force. Why else would he chose a course of action—frontal assault against a heavily defended redoubt, although less risky intellectually, i.e. in terms of what was required of him and his leadership ability in order to execute, that was clearly going to result in larger numbers of casualties. Napoleon's unimaginative tactics indicated his unwavering adherence to the defining operational framework—'being stronger at a given place.' What he lacked in this case was the situational awareness to see that the 'given place' was not the heavily defended center of the Russian lines, but the exposed Southern flank.

Among the other marshals, Ney also offered an opposing voice to Napoleon's plan. Marshal Ney's reputation was that of a headstrong infantry commander who would, after the Russian campaign, be referred to as the "bravest of the brave." He had credibility as a tactician and his bravery was legend, but he was seen by Napoleon as "brave and nothing more…good at leading 10,000 men into battle, but other than that…a real blockhead."[17] The psychological attribute 'blockhead' gave Ney's judgments little credence and led to a 'position,' but was not itself the position. Because of Ney's lack of credibility in the eyes of Napoleon, he had not much *right* to offer opinions, since little credence was placed in his opinion, although in this case the Emperor should have heeded his council.

14 Napoleon Bonaparte, p. 610.
15 Ibid.
16 Napoleon Bonaparte, p. 728.
17 Napoleon Bonaparte, p. 737.

The other marshal involved in this discourse is Murat. His relationship with Napoleon was one of tension and enmity. Napoleon thought him too independent and not servile enough, except when in the emperor's presence.[18] According to Caulaincourt, the Duke of Vicenza—whose memoirs of his experiences with Napoleon on the Russian campaign afford a unique view of Napoleon and his staff—Murat routinely offered opposing views to Napoleon. Speaking of Murat, Caulaincourt said: "He even ventured to make some remarks to this effect to the Emperor (about the large numbers of horses that had died or were so weak to be of little use to the cavalry and how this would put the entire enterprise at risk in the weeks and months ahead) but his majesty did not care for reflections that ran counter to his projects and lent a deaf ear."[19] In other words, unless the views were supportive, Napoleon positioned that person as having no *right* to venture an opinion, i.e., that person lost their 'footing' in the discourse. According to Davies and Harre, "we gain or lose our footing in conversations, social groups and so on, much as we gain or lose it on a muddy slope."[20] Caulaincourt then observed that when Murat sensed Napoleon's disinterest "he changed the subject…by doing so kept to himself the wise reflections which he had voiced to us alone. He soon forgot them entirely."[21]

So during the initial act of positioning while having the *right* to an opinion since they were credited with situational awareness, Davout and Ney openly questioned Napoleon about his choice of tactics. They both positioned themselves as having both the *right* and the *duty* to intervene since each believed himself to know best what the situation was on the battlefield; Davout with his knowledge of the exposed Russian flank and the direction that the Russians guns are pointed, and Ney with his awareness of the effect that the thick forest would have on the cohesion of the attacking divisions. Murat remains silent however; content to position himself as 'all duty' that is as a loyal, and capable cavalry commander.

On the morning of 7 Sept 1812 at the opening of the battle, no sooner had the artillery barrage started than it had to be stopped in order to move the guns forward, closer to the front lines so that their cannon balls could be effective against the Russian troops. Napoleon himself, the expert artillery tactician, had placed the guns, above the objections of his subordinate commanders, in those exact locations prior to the battle. After this error was evident to all, others were positioning him in quite the opposite way, perhaps as no longer having the *right* to be obeyed.

The one thing that is perhaps most telling with regard to the implications of the positioning act of the right to command on the basis of situational awareness is when Napoleon speaks of the battlefield as if it were a chessboard. This analogy to the chessboard is an important part in the developing story-line of this battle.

18 De Caulaincourt, With Napoleon In Russia (New York, William Morrow and Company,1935) p. 40
19 With Napoleon in Russia, p. 63.
20 Positioning Theory,p.44.
21 Ibid.

The chessboard analogy is an important part of our story because it shows that Napoleon was expecting to "see" clearly the layout of his and the enemies forces on the battlefield, in other words, he expected that he would eventually have perfect situational awareness. That expectation of perfect situational awareness, in turn, became a requirement for his decisions, while at the same time becoming a condition, through which a position of authority was occupied, i.e., the *right* to direct the battle and through which the story-line was developed.

So throughout the morning of September 7, 1812 the emperor waited, and waited for the perfect understanding, which in turn would make the perfect decision both evident and possible. Instead, what happened was that Napoleon made decisions, or did not make decisions, in order to appear to be in control of a situation that was actually beyond his ability to influence in any direct way. He could only influence the situation at Borodino by operating in one network at a time. In other words, if he wanted to make tactical decisions he needed to physically and mentally locate himself in a manner that allowed him to build situational awareness about what was happening in those tactical networks. In fact, what occurred at Borodino was that he was intellectually operating in the strategic network while trying to influence events in the tactical network.

Marshal Ney realized this was occurring when, on being told what Napoleon said about wanting to see the chessboard more clearly, burst out:" What's the Emperor doing behind his army? He doesn't see any of our successes there—only our reverses. Since he isn't fighting the war himself any longer and isn't the general any more, but wants to play the Emperor everywhere, why doesn't he go back to the Tuileries and let us be generals for him?"[22] The secondary story-line that the battle was a game of chess, complimented the fatal mismatch between the strategic and tactical levels of war. The strategic level of war, as discussed earlier, is the one in which leaders are concerned with matters of grand strategy, such as the decision to invade Russia or to form an alliance with the Prussians. The tactical level of war, on the other hand, is the one in which leaders are concerned with the elements of execution of the grand strategy, such as the decision about where to employ artillery or whether or not to attack the Russians at Borodino frontally or from a flank. It is critically important for a commander to be aware of the level of war, i.e. the network, in which he is operating, because each has its own unique attributes and the linkage between the two is often not easily discernible.

I would suggest that what is happening here is that Napoleon has been confused by trying to understand and operate in both the strategic and tactical networks. His playing the role of both general and emperor exacerbated this confusion about thinking in one network while trying to execute in another.

22 Ibid.

BEING THE EMPEROR

Due to this confusion on Napoleon's part, which contributed to his lack of situational awareness, the only decision he made all day that had an effect on the battlefield was the one regarding the employment of the reserve forces, which in this case were the Imperial Guard. He held back the Guard, not committing them to the battle, for strategic not tactical reasons, even though he was ostensibly trying to win the tactical battle of Borodino that was part of his strategic war against Russia. This was because even though the Guard may well have achieved a tactical victory that day, he could ill afford to risk losing them if he was to maintain his position as the Emperor of France. Napoleon's position as the Emperor is what gave him the *right* and the *duty* to make strategic decisions, such as the one to invade Russia. In this instance he made a tactical decision, i.e. not to employ the Imperial Guard in order to maintain his position as Emperor in that strategic network. So the dialog that he had with his marshals and others in his war council was for the principle reason of perpetuating that micro-world. The story-line in that micro-world was one in which Napoleon Bonaparte was, and remained, the Emperor of France. Regardless of how well Napoleon played the role of Emperor, he could not simultaneously and adequately play the role of field general.

There is an interesting parallel here to Adolph Hitler's positioning during Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of Russia in June 1941. There are obvious similarities – both he and Napoleon initiated campaigns into Russia, suffered through brutal winter conditions, grappled the "Bear" in titanic military struggles and were ultimately defeated. However, there is a subtler, but no less powerful connection between the two. In comparing the campaigns we see Napoleon positioning himself as the Emperor while trying to make decisions as if he were a field marshal. Hitler, on the other hand, positioned himself as a field marshal when arguably he should have positioned himself as the Fuhrer. In each case they confused the level or network of war in which they chose to operate with the level of war in which others positioned them. Napoleon is acting like an emperor when he is positioned to be a general; Hitler is acting like a general when he is positioned to be the Fuhrer.

THE ARABIAN CAMPAIGN 1916

In this next section we examine a military operation very different from the classic set-piece battle of Borodino. We focus on the central figure of T.E. Lawrence, a British officer who was different in nearly every imaginable way from Napoleon. As in the examination of Napoleon and his Marshals, what interest us are the relations between Lawrence and the Arab chiefs. Those chiefs are the ones who are actually directing the fighting against the Turks on the Arabian Peninsula in 1917. In order to understand those relations we look at three primary issues. First, the effects of the decisions that were made on the conduct of operations, second, the extent to which the decisions were intended to influence other decision makers, and third, the extent to which positioning of the participants contributed to the perpetuation of the micro world create by the discourse among those players. We will attempt to understand the positions of the participants through the same prism we used in the first study, that is the construct of situational awareness, or the level of understanding of a mutually created and commonly accepted reality.

Finally we will apply the same notion of the strategic and tactical levels of war to better understand the networks in which Lawrence is operating. Those networks extend to his relations with both the Arab chiefs whom he was advising and with his distant and mostly disengaged British superiors.

SETTING THE STAGE

T. E. Lawrence was neither an emperor nor a field marshal; rather he was a young British subaltern (a reservist no less) with a degree from Oxford. His uncommon depth of knowledge about the Middle East was gained from participating in archeological digs in the region prior to the outbreak of the First World War. At the time of the Arab revolt against the Turks in 1916 he was posted to British headquarters in Cairo, Egypt. There, his knowledge of Arabic language and customs positioned him as having the right to offer opinions about the region, but because of his lack of proper military experience, not about military operations. To most of the British officers in those days the 'proper' experience for a subaltern was on the Western front in France fighting from the trenches and offering periodic sacrifices by charging headlong across open ground swept by cannon and machine gun fire. Napoleon would have understood these tactics, since as we saw he employed them at Borodino a hundred years before. These tactics could be characterized as the *direct approach*, of being "stronger at a given place"[23] and were the accepted Western way of war; to suggest anything contrary was, at the time, considered blasphemous.

Lawrence, on the other hand, was making the case to those in and out of his headquarters that the situation in Arabia was different and called for a more *indirect approach* in both strategy and tactics. While there were some senior officers who thought his ideas about encouraging an Arab revolt worthy of consideration, most of his superiors on the staff positioned him characterologically as "…generally impudent, often rude,"[24] weakening his right to advise. Lawrence believed that a revolt by the Arabs (encouraged and abetted by the British), as opposed to direct military confrontation, was the best way for the British to defeat Germany's ally in the region—Turkey. The Arab revolt did occur (initially without British involvement) in October 1916 with the capture of Mecca from the Turks, in what today is Saudi Arabia. Consequently, Lawrence on his own and without official orders went to visit the Arab sheiks that started the revolt. That visit marked the beginning of the creation, and subsequent positioning of "Lawrence of Arabia."

There are two story-lines that interest us in this study. First, that "I" (Lawrence) am the sole British advisor to the most important Arab sheik, Emir Feisal and have the *right* to offer opinions and advice about military operations, second that "I" (Lawrence) am a soldier in Feisal's band of irregulars and have the *duty* to lead them to victory over the Turks.

23 Nicolson, Napoleon 1812 (New York, Harper & Row, 1985) p.26.
24 Asprey, War in the Shadows, (William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, 1994) p.179.

THE INITIAL POSITIONING ACT

The initial positioning act is one in which Lawrence establishes his credibility as an advisor to Feisal. He does this by showing genuine respect for the uniqueness of Arab culture, while at the same time not imposing on them a Western point of view, thereby positioning himself as both not British and not Arab.

> I was sent to these Arabs as a stranger, unable to think their thoughts or subscribe their beliefs…If I could not assume their character, I could at least conceal my own, and pass among them without evident friction, neither a discord nor a critic but an unnoticed influence.[25]

The way in which Lawrence went about being an "unnoticed influence" was not always subtle, but was nearly always effective. He began by formulating a new way of interpreting and understanding war, one at odds with the traditional Napoleonic notion of absolute war whose end state was the physical destruction of the enemy army in battle. This traditional theory of war would clearly not provide a useful model in this case since the Arabs did not possess the means to physically destroy the Turkish army. By developing this new way of understanding warfare he positioned himself as having greater situational awareness (of the true nature of the conflict in Arabia) than his fellow British officers or the Arabs chiefs that he was to advise.

A NEW THEORY OF WAR

Lawrence proposed to understand the strategic and tactical imperatives of warfare by thinking about the three elements of war: "the Algebraical element of things, a Biological element of lives, and the Psychological element of ideas."[26] The algebraical element was the science of calculation, whereby he determined the number of soldiers required to defend a certain area of land or the number of soldiers required to defeat another army in a set-piece battle, like the one at Borodino. His calculations in this regard confirmed for him two important things. First, that the small numbers of Arabs engaged in the revolt could not expect to defeat the Turks in a pitched battle, and second that the number of Turkish soldiers needed to defend the entire Arabian peninsula was well beyond the number that the Turks had available to employ. These two numerical facts provided the impetus for the subsequently development of his unique strategy.

25 Lawrence, Seven Pillars Of Wisdom, (Random House, Inc., New York, 1991) p.30.
26 Seven Pillars Of Wisdom, p.192.

The biological element or what Lawrence later calls the "biological factor in command"[27] concerns the transformation of the illogical into the logical in a way that enables one to feel a level of certainty about making decisions. In other words the biological element is that which is informed by knowledge of the culture of both the Arabs and the Turks to a degree that helps make logical sense of seemingly illogical patterns of behavior. In explaining this notion he acknowledged that the previous "philosophers of war" who tied this element to the "effusion of blood"[28] were right to highlight the pervasive dialectic of life and death that is the nature of warfare. This is obvious enough, but Lawrence goes a step further and applies this dialectic more widely.

He does this by taking the metaphor beyond the merely corporeal and applies it to the relationship between certainty and uncertainty and the subsequent effect of tying that synthesis to the logical process of decision-making. In our previous examination of Napoleon's decisions at Borodino we saw that this same tension between certainty and uncertainty was what drove the Emperor's impulse for greater situational awareness. This impulse he hoped would enable him to "see the chessboard (the battlefield) more clearly."

Lawrence describes the elements that contribute to the understanding of the transformation from uncertainty to certainty in the following way: "The components were sensitive and illogical, and generals guarded themselves by the device of a reserve, the significant medium of their art."[29] In other words the reserve is the hedge against what one does not know, it is the "irrational tenth…and in it lay the test of generals."[30] It is in this "space" of the "irrational tenth" that the positioning of the commander is of greatest interest because it is here that the commander not only has the *right* to make decisions but also has the *duty* to understand the imperative against being rational in making those decisions. Napoleon at Borodino may have seemed to be behaving irrationally, but he made his decision about committing the reserve (the Imperial Guard) in a very rational way. In fact, in this case the situation demanded an irrational decision, one based on an unquantifiable "feel" for the situation on the battlefield and something that Napoleon had demonstrated a genius for in previous battles.

In terms of the different approach to warfare that Lawrence was postulating, the unifying theme of these three elements was the importance of in-depth knowledge of the adversary, which is always the prerequisite to developing any effective strategy. For example, in the case of the Arab revolt, Lawrence rightly saw that the Turks greatest vulnerability was the materials with which they needed to fight.

27 Seven Pillars of Wisdom, p.193.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.

Alternately the Arab's greatest vulnerability was manpower because they were far fewer in number and much more loosely organized. As "irregular" forces the Arabs were accustomed to fighting in small tribal bands and their effectiveness, as soldiers, would decrease exponentially if they suffered even a few casualties. This was because of the relatively large effect of even those few casualties on a small group both in terms of relative numbers and cohesion of the unit. The Turks, on the other hand were organized into larger more structured formations that had a greater capacity to absorb casualties and still retain the capability to operate as a unit.

Lawrence, when employing his own warfare principles, and in developing his knowledge of the adversary, discovered that the Turks were completely dependent on their own fragile logistics system to sustain their operations. Based on this knowledge, Lawrence, who had no authority to direct, but did have the *right* and the *duty* to advise, created an unorthodox strategy for defeating the Turks. He proposed to disrupt and destroy their means of support, and not their army. Thus he transformed his theory of the *indirect approach* into an actual operational plan. This strategy showed deep understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of both the Arabs and the Turks.

The third and final of Lawrence's elements of war, the psychological element was described as "…our 'propaganda'…It was the pathic, almost the ethical, in war. Some of it concerned the crowd...some of it concerned the individual."[31] Lawrence draws out an important notion in this section when he describes how he thought the Europeans' interest in the art of war was misplaced because they were more concerned with the weapons with which men fought. He on the other hand thought they should focus on understanding the beliefs with which men fought, since it was beliefs that motivated the behaviors of men. This element was, in his mind arguably the most important of the three and the hardest to categorize however undeniable it's central role in understanding warfare. Taken together these three elements, the algebraical, the biological, and the psychological, were the foundation that led him to refine his theory of an *indirect approach*, one that was like" a thing intangible, invulnerable, without front or back, drifting about like a gas?"[32]

LEVELS AND NETWORKS OF WAR

In 1916 greatly outnumbered irregular Arab forces were fighting a war on the Arabian Peninsula against regular Turkish forces. Because of their dearth of fighters there was no advantage to the Arabs in engaging the Turks in the way Napoleon had engaged the Russians—by direct assault. Lawrence points out the contrast by observing: " Napoleon said it was rare to find generals willing to fight battles; but the curse of this war was that so few could do anything else."[33]

31 Seven Pillars of Wisdom, p.195.
32 Seven Pillars of Wisdom, p.192.
33 Seven Pillars of Wisdom, p.196.

As a result of his position as an advisor Lawrence had the *right* to put forth a strategy that privileged the metaphysical or more irrational indirect approach over the material or more empirical direct approach. He also had the *duty* in his position as a soldier to carry out tactical actions necessary to insure the success of that strategy. Those tactical actions contrarily privileged the material over the metaphysical. Unlike Napoleon, he seems not to have confused the two.

The following passage indicates how Lawrence was able understand his position in both the strategic and tactical levels of war. Early in his service with the Emir Fiesal's band of Arabs, Lawrence was leading a small raiding party on a long march over a period of weeks. In the course of this march there was increasing tension between men of the different tribes that made up his party. On one particular occasion, it reached a breaking point, which Lawrence later described: "My followers had been quarreling all day; and while I was lying near the rocks a shot was fired…one of the men was lying stone dead with a bullet through his temples."[34] He quickly determined that the killer was a man named Hamed. Since the killing stemmed from an ongoing feud between two tribes in his group, Lawrence, as the leader of the group and not belonging to either tribe was positioned as the one whose *duty* it was to execute the murderer. Lawrence recalled the incident in the following passage

> It must be a formal execution, and at last, desperately
> I told Hamed that he must die for punishment and laid
> the burden of his killing on myself. Perhaps they would
> count me not qualified for feud…for I was a stranger
> and kinless.[35]

Positioned as the leader of the group by Fiesal he was also additionally positioned by the men in the group as being a "stranger and kinless" and therefore as having both the *right* and the *duty* to pass judgment and administer the punishment. This episode of a tactical action, is certainly in stark contrast to the *indirect approach* he championed as the necessary strategy to defeat the Turks. It also suggests that Lawrence, far better than

Napoleon, understood the dichotomous relationship between the strategic and tactical levels of war and the effect on his *rights* and *duties* in each. This understanding also enabled Lawrence to have much greater situational awareness in carrying out the ongoing day-to-day operations that ultimately lead to the success of his strategy.

34 Seven Pillars of Wisdom, p.181.
35 Ibid.

Finally, we explore the difference in the behavior of the two men through the lens of positioning theory and their understanding of the implications of positioning. First we turn to Napoleon and observe him the night before the battle of Borodino. Napoleon had doubts in the hours before the battle that his orders were being obeyed but he did nothing to try to change his position from being the Emperor to being the field general.[36] If he were to have done that he would have injected himself into the tactical network where orders are executed in order to insure that they were being obeyed. He clearly seems not to have understood the relation between the networks of war. Lawrence however did understand that if he was to have influence as an advisor and as a strategist he must be positioned as one who is obeyed.

The distinction between the two becomes even more evident when we look at positioning and the right to be obeyed in these episodes. Napoleon during the evening before the battle did nothing more than simply ask one of his guards what orders he had received. He consequently made no attempt to insure that his (Napoleon's) orders were being carried out. Lawrence on the other hand reacted quite differently when faced with a situation that similarly demanded obedience. He did far more than simply inquire of his men what they thought they had been ordered to do; he shot and killed one of them to insure the obedience of the rest.

CONCLUSION

The application of positioning theory to military leadership offers a conceptual framework in which to examine different leaders in different situations in order to better understand positioning in local moral orders. We have seen that positioning can be intentional or unintentional, occurring at different levels and created through discursive practices. In the case studies we also examined the relationship between positioning in strategic (metaphysical) and tactical (material) networks. This relationship is most evident when we come to understand that while there is positioning at one level to insure the continuation of the metaphysical micro world of the participants, there is also positioning at another level that reflects the material world of the participants. The positioning at the material level has the objective of ensuring that the actions necessary to achieve the tactical victory that is the *duty* of generals are occurring in order that the strategic victory that is the *duty* of statesmen (and emperors) is accomplished.

36 De Segur, Napoleon's Russian Campaign (Cambridge, The Riverside Press, 1958) p.63.